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# Mainstream Democrats Swept Along by the Current

"People of Fulham," I can remember Auberon Waugh bellowing through a megaphone back in the mid-1960s in London, "a terrible choice confronts you: the choice between an imbecile and a mass murderer!" Mr. Waugh was running as a write-in candidate in the borough of Fulham and trying to alert the voters to the limited appeal of the candidates of the two major parties. In this instance, the imbecile was some long-forgotten Conservative and the mass murderer was the Labor for-

of workers' compensation laws. According to the Albuquerque Journal, the two candidates "did not dispute what the other said" and indeed were in hearty agreement on the need for local economic development and a top-notch educational system.

So, no fierce brawl in New Mexico. But wait a minute! Was it not Garrey Carruthers who, as henchperson to Mr. Watt, tried to open all wilderness areas to mining and kindred exploitation; supported the opening of wildlife refuges to oil and gas leasing; pushed for coal leasing in the San Juan basin, which contains the Chaco Culture National Historic Park? Such are some of the charges leveled by conservation groups, and you might think that the underdog Powell might try to gain the initiative by portraying Mr. Carruthers as the sort of man who, given half a chance, would leave New Mexico looking like Chernobyl. But Mr. Powell is not planning to make Mr. Carruthers's environmental record an issue. "I've really tried to conduct a positive, issue-oriented campaign," he told the Albuquerque Journal. "It's not my nature to be critical."

You can write Mr. Powell's humble psychological self-portrait across the national political canvas. It isn't in the Democrats' nature to be critical, and every day that passes gives us another example. The polls tell us that President Reagan's Central America policy is not one that has earned him broad public support. Despite a torrent of propaganda, popular opinion remains opposed to attempts to overturn the government of Nicaragua and fund the murderous thugs known as the contras.

Oblivious to the public mood and terrorized by the Great Communicator, the Democrats in Congress duly voted for military aid for the contras. Once handed the affair of the downed supply plane in Nicaragua and the confessional Eugene Hasenfus, have the Democrats bellowed righteously about breached guidelines and illegal activity by the CIA and possibly Vice President Bush? No, they have passed the smoking gun cautiously from hand to hand, noting that whereas it seems to be a gun and smoke appears to be pouring from its barrel, they also find some plausibility in the urgent denials by the administration of any complicity in the matter.

Last week Rep. Michael Barnes (D., Md.) scheduled a public hearing by his subcommittee to take testimony about the administration's shadier dealings in Central America. Mr. Barnes's Democratic colleagues were sufficiently remiss in their attendance to permit the Republicans on the subcommittee to have enough votes to push the hearings into confidential executive session during a crucial portion, thus keeping embarrassing matters off the network news and out of the headlines.

In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Iceland summit it seemed likely that here was an issue—war or peace in our time—that even the Democrats couldn't fluff. Mr. Reagan and his aides certainly saw the danger and mounted a fierce propaganda offensive to persuade the voters that Star Wars or nothing had been the correct policy to adopt. For a moment the Democrats saw their opportunity. Sen. Sam Nunn of Georgia, freighted with respectability on defense matters, proclaimed to the TV cameras that the president had disdained a bird in the hand for one in the bush. But by the end of that week Mr. Nunn was pronouncing his "relief" that no agreement had been reached in Iceland and was urging Mr. Reagan "to pull his zero ballistic missile proposal off the table before the Soviets accept it." This is the sort of talk that made Fritz Mondale such a hit with the voters when he lashed out at Mr. Reagan for endangering national security by promising to share Star Wars research with the Soviets.

The national political debate is now skewed so far over to the right that a story in this newspaper on Monday thought it useful to quote a White House analyst as saying that Florida's Democratic Gov. Bob Graham is more liberal than Sen. Paula Hawkins but "not wild-eyed." Sparky Graham a wild-eyed liberal? Come on, fellows. Poor Mark Green, running against New York's GOP Sen. Al D'Amato, is being portrayed as though he were Trotsky's grandson, even though any rational political description would have him for what he is, a mainstream liberal. When Mr. D'Amato filibustered the government into imminent bankruptcy in the cause of the Fairchild Corp. we didn't hear Mr. Green protesting this pork-barreling on behalf of a plane manufacturer so incompetent as to be the despair of the U.S. Air Force.

In a way I suppose one should feel sorry for the Democrats. It must be hard to fight a campaign when you are in essential agreement with your opponent on all the major issues of the day and when you have nothing interesting to say about ways to end the arms race or to get the economy moving. Voters notice this sort of thing and so do younger folk imbued with romantic ideas about elections being about real choices. Mr. Reagan didn't get where he is today by wallowing in the "mainstream," and the Democrats shouldn't forget this indisputable fact.

## Viewpoint

By Alexander Cockburn

ign secretary who was supportive of the Nigerian government in its war against the Biafran separatists.

Mr. Waugh's bid failed, but his cry to the people of Fulham has always stuck in my mind as a particularly succinct expression of the limited options available to voters when election time rolls round. Never more so, at least as far as the U.S. is concerned, than in the fall of 1986. Turn on the television and the same voices express the same unfaltering opposition to terrorism, the deficit and Soviet expansionism and the same unfaltering support for Israel and the free market. Often the only way you can tell one candidate from the other is a certain craven edge to the Democrat's voice—a spiritual and intellectual defensiveness that all the public-relations arts cannot conceal.

It's the same wherever you go. Earlier this week I was traveling through New Mexico where you might suppose that the brawny traditions of the old Southwest would prompt the candidates to stand toe to toe and slug it out. But what do we find in the race to succeed outgoing Democratic Gov. Toney Anaya? In the Republican corner we find Garrey Carruthers, who now runs an economic development consulting firm and who previously served as assistant secretary of the Interior Department under James Watt. In remarks last week, Mr. Carruthers said he favored an "improved" business climate, along with a tightening of workers' compensation laws.

The Democratic candidate is Ray Powell, who has spent most of his life working for Sandia National Laboratories, which makes him a career officer in the military-industrial complex. Appearing on the same platforms as Mr. Carruthers, Mr. Powell last week said he favored an "improved" business climate, along with a tightening